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Unplugged Lines: Narratives in Practice

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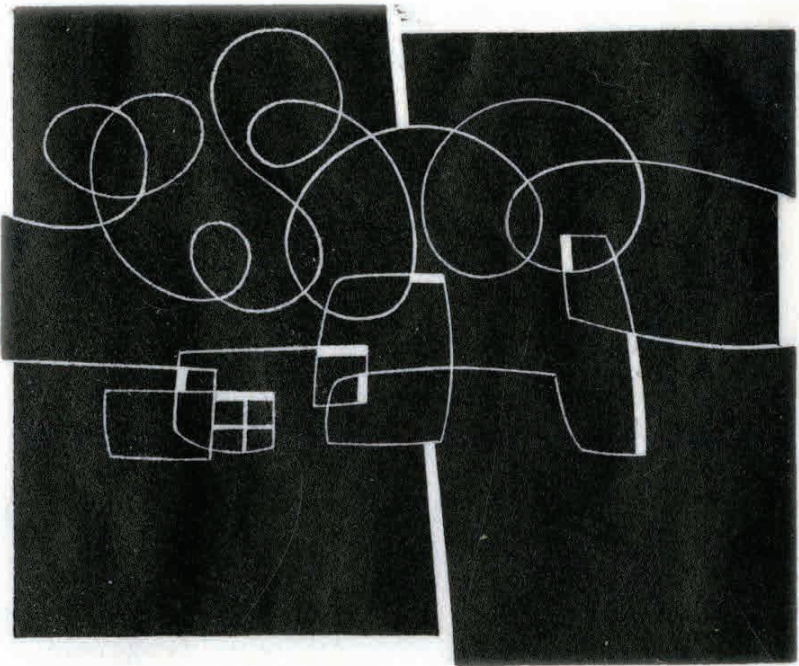
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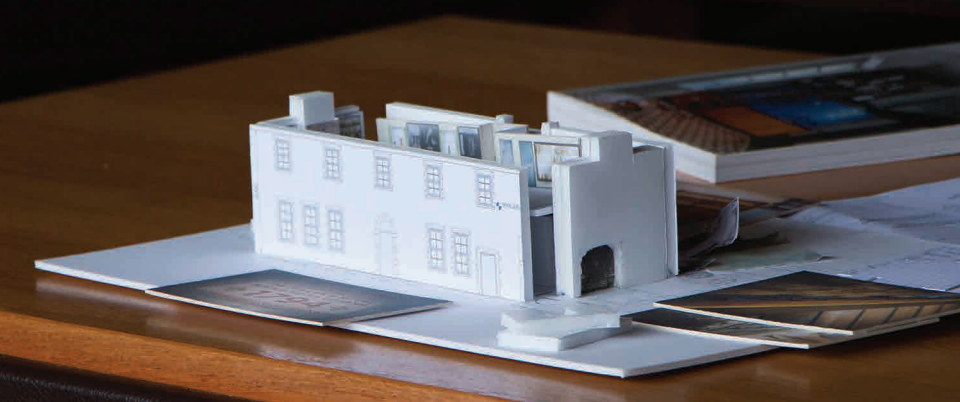
UNPLUGGED LINES:
Narratives in Practice



Lines has a broad interest in narrative and storytelling which incorporates process, practice and structure.

We are interested in how and why we tell stories in and through visual and material culture.

We are developing multi-disciplinary approaches to research with outputs in talks, workshops, collaborative research and new teaching methods.



UNPLUGGED LINES: Narratives in Practice

What stories do we tell about design?

What stories can design tell?

How can we design stories?

In June 2017, Lines interdisciplinary research group held a one-day symposium to discuss the relationships between storytelling, and the practices of Design. Nine current Lines members presented to a small invited audience, including our guest chair, Dr Jane Norris.

Each presentation was 'unplugged' and artefact based. Presenters were asked to foreground the narrative in their practice, to share current research questions, test out new modes of delivery and explore connecting themes.

As a group, we identified several interconnected areas of interest and have expanded on these themes in our writing:

Narrative & Time

Histories: Memory: Material Culture: Heritage

Narrative & (Stuff) Materials

Digital vs Material: Virtual Reality: Immaterial: Representations

Narrative & Truth

Fact & Fiction: Representations of Reality

Narrative & Place

Connections: Belonging: Community: Collaborations

Narrative & Time

Lindy Richardson

Digestive Histories

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/lindy-richardson>

Shirley Mclauchlan

Cherish Ability: Exploring this as a designer

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/shirley-mclauchlan>

Narrative & (Stuff) Materials

Jonathan Gibbs

Linear Concepts in Text, Sound & Image

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/jonathan-gibbs>

Gina Leith

Material Intervention: A Virtual Representation of Material Reality

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/gina-leith>

Narrative & Truth

Dr Cath Keay

Crystal clarity: Veracity and fantasy in Expressionism

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/cath-keay>

Harvey Dingwall

Tessolated discussions: graphic recording and the Bohm dialogue

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/harvey-dingwall>

John Morrison

Ethnofiction: Surrealism <-> Digital Ethnography

<http://www.de.ed.ac.uk/people/john-morrison>

Narrative & Place

Mike Windle

Is it a film? Is it a painting? It's a Filmpainting! A St Kilda Story

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/mike-windle>

Professor Ed Hollis

Minefields: Excavating the Studio of Rita Alaoui

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/ed-hollis>

Dr Jane Norris

Narrative Materials / Material Narratives - a Provocation



Dr Jane Norris's keynote talk focused on the possibilities of a 'para-fictional' approach to design. It was a provocation to rethink how we view materials. This use of para-fiction is a design strategy she has developed by assigning narratives to contemporary objects in use, which highlights and challenges current misconceptions about materials (such as stainless steel which is often perceived as hygienic). This strategy offers an alternative form of design fiction to the established use of speculative design that is more future orientated. She situated her use of para-fiction, within a current, wider cultural debate on how post-enlightenment thinking might be used to consider fresh design strategies.

The presentation included a selection of objects - spoons with para-fictional labels attached (ie: some labels were apparently true, some less so, some appeared to be misleading). All the labels underlined the importance of our current cultural narratives about materials, highlighting how these affect our relationship to objects.

This body of work seeks to extend current practices in speculative design, critical design and particularly design fiction.⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾ Design fiction works to offer an alternative to the science fiction binary utopian/dystopian environments. The co-founder of *The Near Future Laboratory*, Fabien Girardin distinguishes design fiction from science fiction: 'Design Fiction doesn't so much 'predict' the future. It is a way to consider the future differently'. ⁽³⁾ As can be seen here, the emphasis of speculative design has been on building alternative versions of the future and constructing different fictional environments within which new objects, products or services can be re-thought and virtually trialled. Design fiction is still largely trapped within Modernist linear conceptual structures that continually prioritise the new. What this approach does not address very effectively, are issues focusing on material use in the present, unless it is by inference or contrast.

Norris's proposal of a para-fictional approach used in the Narrative Materials / Material Narratives presentation explores how storytelling and fiction can be used to shift popular perceptions around materials used now, in everyday contemporary objects. The para-fiction works like a para-medic, first to the scene and applying immediate action to divert consequences. It is not focused on the acting out of scenarios in a removed theoretical 'design hospital' of the future, but rather on a more immediate change in perception in the present time. The strategy of para-fiction offers a lateral re-contextualising of the present, which explores pre-enlightenment structures of thinking such as Michel Foucault's four categories: adjacency, emulation, analogy and sympathy ⁽⁴⁾ to step outside of contemporary linear developmental ways of thinking about materials and relating to objects.

The methodology used in this research employed theories of emergent making. This approach written extensively on the by Jane Bennett et al ⁽⁵⁾, was identified as an appropriate alternative to Modernist linear developmental models that have largely caused the material problems we now face. Emergent theory allowed Norris as a researcher to step outside the Modernist paradigms that she grew up with; and to observe and note new possibilities formed by a horizontal network of material possibilities presented by a digital aerial view. This methodology is also harmonious with post-enlightenment forms of awareness and learning.

Our Anthropocene age is largely the result of a Western twentieth century industrial insistence on the use of a narrow selection of materials such as toxic petrochemical derivatives: plastic, polystyrene, or shiny metals like stainless steel and aluminium, to promote modernist mass consumption. To address these issues of environmental sustainability and material depletion, it is vital for the health of the globe that our perception of, and choice of materials are re-thought.

Para-fictional design seeks to highlight the issues of perception that cloud our current materials use in everyday objects. This strategy aims to open space for designers and consumers to rethink how materials are used in objects and therefor the use of the objects themselves. If these issues are not addressed future generations will face considerable material / global problems. In addition, our current limited use of materials will lead to a further impoverished range of objects and tactile experience. With the increasing cultural dissatisfaction and critical questioning of mass consumption proposed by the Western enlightenment project, it is vital that different relationships to materials and objects are researched within the design community.

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(1) Term coined by Bruce Sterling in 2005 and extended by Julian Bleeker in a 2009 essay that formally established the concept

(2) Lindley, Joseph; Coulton, Paul (2015). "Back to the Future: 10 Years of Design Fiction" Proceedings of the 2015 British HCI Conference. British HCI '15. New York, NY, USA

(3) Girardin, Fabien (October 2015). "Our Approach of Design Fiction". Medium

(4) Foucault M (1970) The Order of Things Routledge Classics UK

(5) Bennett J, Connolly W, (2012) The Crumpled Handkerchief in Herzogenrath B, (2012) ed Time and History in Deleuze and Serres UK Bloomsbury Academic Publishing

Ed Hollis

What Remains
What Remains?
What Remains!



Introducing Rita Alaoui

“Meet Rita,” she said, “she’s a Moroccan artist, student in the art schools of Paris and New York. Her great grandmother was kidnapped to be a slave, oh, and yes, she’s descended from the Prophet.”

That’s what she said. Literally. She’d invited me for a drink in her hotel, in some palace in Marrakesh, and that’s how she introduced me.

“I’ll get you a show in Zurich,” she said, but I never heard from her again.

The Berber House

I show Rita Pierre Bourdieu’s famous plan of the Berber House: ‘I’m going to draw your studio,’ I say, ‘and interview you, and perhaps, there’ll be a sort of anthropology in there.’

‘We have to start somewhere, I suppose.’

She takes a box from the arched alcove opposite her desk, and opens it. Inside, are two photographs of a real Berber House she went to visit a couple of years ago.

‘There’s only one room.’ she says, ‘In the day they pack everything away, and only two things remain in there:

Above the window, carved into the plaster, the name of God

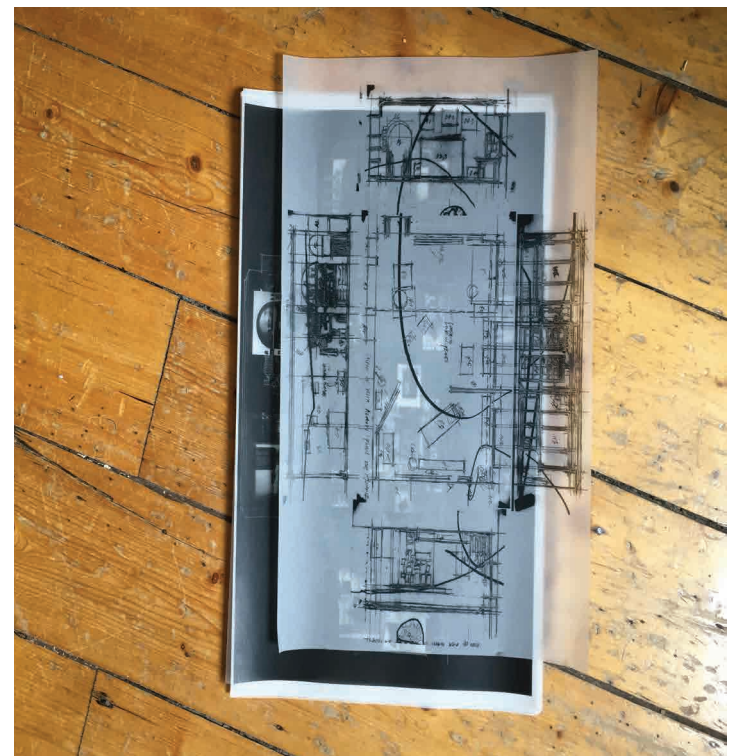
Below the window, placed on the carpet, the television.’

This project represents what remains of a collaborative process. In 2017 the artist Rita Alaoui and the writer Edward Hollis took up residence in one another’s very different worlds. Hollis travelled to the artist’s studio in Casablanca, and Alaoui to the University of Edinburgh; and in those cities, north and south, they sought to investigate, and to record, the traces – what remains - of the lives that are lived there.

Hollis spent time in Alaoui’s studio mapping the objects, precious and profane, that Alaoui collects as the germ of her practice. Working together, the writer and the artist used them to trigger recollections and reflections on the nature of her own practice of making and collecting.

This process has been synthesized into a visual a map of the artist’s studio as a portrait, in things, of the artist herself. It is accompanied by a series of short stories about clues and traces that Hollis encountered in the studio – what remains – of Alaoui’s creative process.

Hollis and Alaoui are currently working on the synthesis of this work into an artist book.



Cath Keay

lines crazing the sky

In this performance Cath Keay presented two print editions produced in collaboration with architect Miguel Paredes Maldonado. She read aloud a passage of text describing the creation of these prints and handed objects wrapped in tissue to the audience- who unwrapped and revealed these to be samples of natural crystals. Crystals are a recurring theme in her research project *Extending the Glass Chain-100 years on* about utopian Expressionist architecture. This passage was one of fourteen accounts of this research, which she has written within strict 200-word limits; a format echoing the constraints of many application forms and research statements.

BlueprintsstnrpeulB

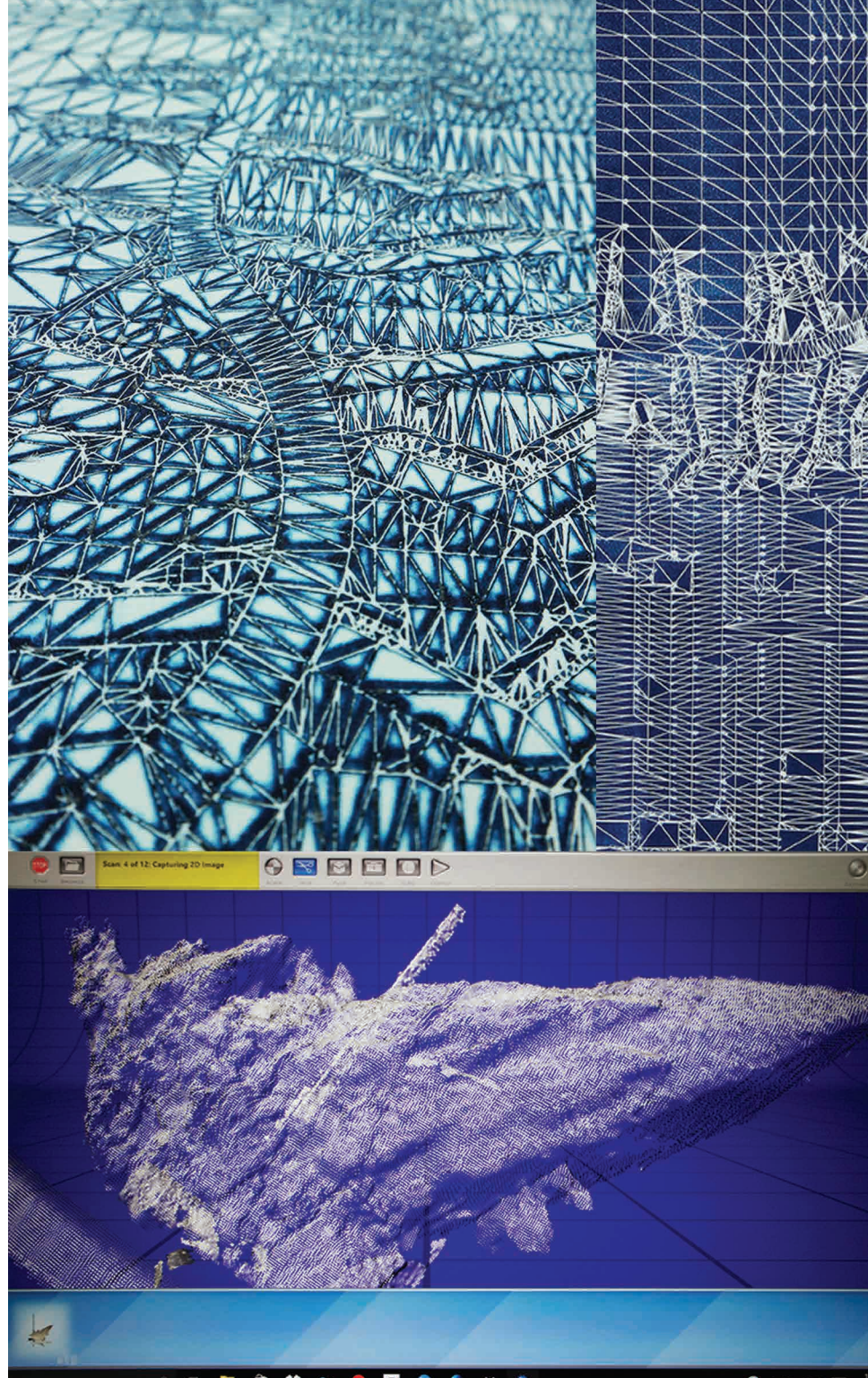
Mondfleck and myself collaborated on two print editions from his architectural scheme for row housing on a cold, remote island.

The Gläserne Kette architects used gelatin plates to duplicate their ideas for distribution round the group. Hablik's *Flower Greetings from the New World* (1920) exists both as ink drawing on brown paper, and as blueprint negatives: crystalline flowers transmuted to absent white lines crazing the sky.

One cross-section from Mondfleck's CAD drawing was selected from many viewpoints then lasercut onto acrylic. We produced both relief prints and etchings from this plate, and chose Prussian blue ink as the same colour as the photosensitive compounds that give blueprints their name.

Triangulated vectors lace across the relief print and cluster round buildings to form a cat's cradle of digital information that could denote anything. The process creates texture, thin washes or fathomless velvety blue, with occasional white misprints like gulls.

As an intaglio print, blue ink builds up against the cinctured lines as a snowdrift shadows a wall. This lends the print a deep, textured appearance round the edges of each inkless crevice created by the lasercutter. The result is like icy tracks recording the activities between houses on a snowy morning.



John Morrison

Ethnofiction:

Recasting the surrealist inspired praxis of ethnographer Jean Rouch (1917-2003) with lens based digital media.

For his doctoral research Morrison's lens-based media and teaching practice is being leveraged in a participatory action research project, which aims to generate authentic insights of the real and perceived barriers for participation in tertiary education among care experienced individuals. Pilot studies at Edinburgh Napier University employed GoPro cameras and virtual reality to explore multiple perspectives in research experiences. The next phase of the inquiry will be produced in collaboration with care experienced young people currently outside of tertiary education and aims to facilitate relational spaces between care leavers and corporate parents.

The research strategy takes inspiration from the pioneering anthropologist and film maker Jean Rouch's shared anthropology. An approach that embraced serendipitous play and new forms of collaboration afforded by the emergence of portable 16mm film cameras. These experiences were actively collaborative, subverting the conventions of researcher and subject power relations with Rouch celebrating his and the cameras provocative role. The resulting ethnofiction films provided rich and nuanced insights of the worldviews of participants', represented through fictional performances of themselves and their dreams for the future. Seminal examples of ethnofiction films include *Jaguar* (1957-67), *Moi, un noir* (1958) and *La pyramide humaine* (1959).

Morrison's research recovers the playful, participatory values of Rouch's ethnographic praxis, recasting it in the 21st century, where we find the 16mm camera employed in Rouch's endeavours replaced by lens-based digital media. These developments in technology present opportunities for exploring new ways for approaching questions of agency, authorship and representation. The research relates to LINES themes of fiction and storytelling, while exploring how digital technologies can create new layers of meaning by reshaping the ways in which information on cultures is encoded, visualised and shared.



Shirley Mclauchlan

Value + Heirloom + Cherishability

For the past 20 years Mclauchlan's design philosophy has explored sustainable design practice; examining how to be a successful sustainable textile designer in a commercial world. Her design background in traditional, commercial textiles was driven and challenged by volume and sales. She now explores her new model of cherishability whereby the textile piece is made to withstand being handed down from one generation to another- quite the opposite of that commercial model.

Her desire to design something that has value and purpose is engrained within each design piece by the considered choice of materials, technique and process. She works with Ayrshire wool blankets that, although no longer manufactured, can still be found. Working directly with individual clients around the world, she designs modern day 'family heirlooms'. No two pieces are ever the same. McLauchlan's distinctive style is evidenced in the detailing and originality of each piece. Each blanket is hand stitched with text selected by the client - a favourite poem or personal message - that is then translated with image to complete the design process.

A special intimate relationship is formed with the client who has shared personal stories in emails or face to face conversations. This relationship is further enhanced by the creation of a unique hand-crafted piece by Mclauchlan specially for them, its value is in owning something that has been made specifically for them.

For the past 5 years this research has been presented as academic papers at sustainable conferences internationally, most recently Mclauchlan presented a reflective study based on data collected from clients she has worked with since 1999.

"The blanket has sentimental value and will remain with me reminding me of all the stages of my childhood. I hope to keep it for my future children" (17-year old owner of a blanket made for him many years ago). The need to create something that will last and be valued is embedded quite literally into the design using hand embroidery. Future research will further examine the relationship between designer and client and its impact in terms of sustainable design.





Michael Windle

Songs from the Frivolous Past

By 1697, Martin Martin had graduated from the University of Edinburgh and made his now famous and arduous tour of the Western Isles of Scotland. He left us some of the earliest descriptions of life on St Kilda, our furthest inhabited island and strong in the national consciousness.

In 1986 I headed out there myself - on a much less well known tour - on an old sailing ship the Lorne Leader, in the company a St Kildan, Lachlan MacDonald, in his eighties at the time and sleeping in the bunk above me. You can see young Lachlan in many of the photos of the island prior to evacuation in 1930. I remember him as tall, friendly, self contained - and with a snore that kept most of us awake (which we of course denied).

In the ship's galley, in the presence of such a man, at sea, another traveller Max MacLeod (his own family part of famous Hebridean lineage) sang old songs to us, his voice natural, untrained and without drama. An ordinary voice made powerful by the setting and company. Max was aware of this. It is a strong memory.

The history of small isles art production is original, varied and great - perhaps the scale of land-to-human helps us feel we are bigger than we actually are.

"Songs from the frivolous past" (a reference to religious austerity imposed from 1822 on St Kilda) will be a series of objects, films and immersive technology surrounding events such as these... on one of the stacs in 1727, three men and eight boys were marooned for 9 months, without any means of communication or understanding why there was no rescue.

They will be improvised pieces using the raw materials available to the castaways and mindful of the few fragments of poetry, spirit and song we have from that time and place.



Gina Leith

Material Intervention: A Virtual Representation of Material Reality

In a profession where representation is often our only medium, and we rely on the skills of others to actually realise and build; are we doing ourselves (and our clients) an injustice through a disassociation with the materiality of the finished article?

As Interior Designers, we create a virtual reality, as a representation of what the built reality will finally become. We never actually make the final object, the designed Interior.

We do not prototype. We sample, but often not at full scale.

Narrative

The presentation begins with the model as a host space. We see the existing building as a marked canvas. By literally stripping back the tangible layers, we demonstrate to our audience how the interior can be a successful narrative device by which to reveal or conceal.

The physical process of removing (as demolishing), articulates the design journey with choices made on what to retain, embellish or reveal. Some features are celebrated, and others hidden from view. Their stories forgotten or secrets revealed. As we begin to construct the secondary layer, complete with new function and use, we discuss the complexity in the balance of old and new, and how this palimpsest, the layering of the past with a new insertion or intervention calls for Interior Designers to have a heightened understanding and an increased appreciation of the use of materials.

The story of a Material

Consideration of our understanding of materials, and how that understanding shapes the way we use them, led to experimenting with stories of materials, based around fact and fiction, the poetic and the pragmatic. Linguistic material samples were passed around the group as physical artefacts which may begin to explore our material understanding of each.

Material as Metaphor

Legend: Origin: Harvest: Creator: Manipulation: Rebirth: Life: Afterlife

And the physical properties or pragmatic considerations

Material as Action

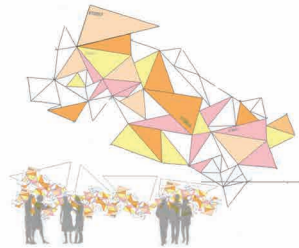
Inherent: Aesthetic: Cost: Durability: Process: Environmental: Finish: Safety

This unplugged presentation utilised drawings, a scaled model, and prototype linguistic material samples, as media to articulate ongoing research questions; attempting to define a dialogue around the material landscape of Interior Design, questioning the process and understanding of material selection.



Harvey Dingwall

Tessolated discussions: graphic recording and dialogic drawing



A simple shift in how we share ideas and make decisions by combining a range of visual communication and facilitation methods, reflecting on the pattern of conversation and ambiguity of drawing.

By using post-it like triangles everyone in the symposium contributed to a combined visual and verbal dialogue to reflect on their interests and potential directions of the LINES group.

It is a blending of two visualisation methods

Graphic recording which is classically carried out by specialist illustrators and done on large sheets documenting meetings and conferences with image and text, is usually drawn in a cartoon style with marker pen. Graphic facilitation is a variation of this where groups are supported by a specialist facilitator to work on large sheets to visualise and problem solve issues as a group.

Design methods commonly use post-it notes to develop ideas at the early stage of the design process. Design studio walls will typically be covered in these notes. This stage is about exploring ideas and forms, sharing these through drawing and discussion while mutating, combining and editing to build different routes to understand and explore the design brief.

This research brings together theories of dialogic drawing, thinking through drawing and design process. It references research into the ambiguity of drawing and recent research into cognition and abstraction.





Jonathan Gibbs

PARCEL! A parcel of eight books has arrived.

It is delivered to the Board Room for the day of LINES research presentations. It is an 'un-plugged' series that is to be filmed and recorded for posterity. This talk comes from the perspective of one who has illustrated a few books, and it reflects upon line as a significant element of textual and pictorial language.

It also touches upon linear concepts of speech, song, and melody. What do books really contain, merely paper, ink, and glue . . . stuff?

I have seized the subject of stuff as one of several themes identified for LINES research.

The un-packing of the parcel opens a description of illustration that stresses hand-made, or hand-crafted aspects of studio practice. *Harris Finds His Feet; Where the Wild Things Are; The Music of Zombies; Papperväxten; Hansel & Gretel; Owl Babies; Goliath; and Il Canto delle Scogliere* are laid out on the table. Five of eight were written and illustrated by ECA alumni & staff.

On the back of the parcel, I draw a bird. This dusty, indistinct image is a continuous line in graphite, taking but a few seconds to complete.

Then, I hold up books for inspection: their weight & volume; their scent & appearance. Such stuffs constitute words and pictures; an elemental and profound combination that defines principal aspects of Illustration.

My illustrative lines are incised into woodblocks. They are incisions that subtract material, creating an absence, to make marks in positive and negative modes.

Following the engraving process, the woodblock is pressed onto Japanese paper. Hand-burnishing transfers the ink from one surface to another, an image in reverse.

An earlier Wee Red Bar LINES event included *East Coast Line*, amongst performances and artefacts made by group members. *East Coast Line* is a musical story of train travel from England to Scotland.

Lindy Richardson

Let them eat cake. Food as a vehicle for storytelling.

Saint Lucy lived in Syracuse hundreds and hundreds of years ago. A thoroughly convicted Christian, she took a vow of chastity devoting herself to Christ. Like many women of her time she was harangued by an influential man who professed his love, admiring in particular her beautiful eyes. He asked to marry her and of course, she refused. As a result, he inflicted terrible tortures on her. Rather than loose her virginity and marry him, Lucy plucked out her own eyes and handed them to her suitor. New eyes more beautiful than the first grew in their place.

Served on a platter, olives and cream cheese encapsulated in eye sockets of pomodorino tomatoes are offered around the table, *'the eyes of Lucy plucked for you'*.

Saint Agatha, a 3rd century Christian virgin from Sicily, suffered similar humiliation to Lucy, being pestered by an influential and wealthy man to accept his advances. Her refusal incensed him, to the point he had her jailed and tortured. Stretched on a rack the soldiers twisted Agatha's breasts and chopped them off. Her breasts were restored that night by Saint Peter who brought celestial ointment to her cell.

'The breasts of Agatha made for you' are proffered to our listeners. Smell the rosewater, taste the sickly pale icing and gently sink your teeth into the coagulated texture of the jelly soaked sponge at the centre of the edible breast.

Food is often used as a metaphor in storytelling, blood presented as wine or chocolate, mangoes as breasts, and of course phallic cucumbers and sausages. This research seeks to incorporate the senses to emphasise smell, touch and taste in addition to sight, the participants ingesting stories through food.





Cover: Jonathan Gibbs

Lines Research Group: <https://sites.eca.ed.ac.uk/lines>



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